

***STEPHEN
PHILLIPS***



NERO

Stephen Phillips

Nero

EAN 8596547207863

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHARACTERS](#)

[ACT I](#)

[ACT II](#)

[ACT III](#)

[SCENE II](#)

[SCENE III](#)

[SCENE IV](#)

[SCENE V](#)

[ACT IV](#)

[SCENE II](#)

CHARACTERS

[Table of Contents](#)

NERO *Emperor of Rome.*
BRITANNICUS *Nero's Half-Brother.*
OTHO *A Young Noble.*
SENECA)) BURRUS))
Ministers of State. TIGELLINUS)) ANICETUS . . .
.)

A SEAMAN.

PARTHIAN CHIEF.

BRITISH CHIEF.

XENOPHON *A Physician.*

SLAVE TO NERO.

AGRIPPINA *Nero's Mother.*
OCTAVIA *Sister to Britannicus.*
POPPAEA *Wife to Otho, afterwards to*
Nero.
ACTE *A Captive Princess.*
LOCUSTA *A Poisoner.*
MYRRHA *Maid to Poppaea.*

HANDMAIDENS, SPIES, ETC.

Five years elapse between Acts I. and II., two years between Acts III. and IV.

ACT I

[Table of Contents](#)

SCENE.—*The scene is in the Great Hall in the Palace of the Caesars. At the back are steps leading to a platform with balustrade opening on the air, and beyond, a view of the city.*

[On the right of the stage is a cedarn couch on which CLAUDIUS is uneasily sleeping. On the right is a door communicating with the inner apartments. On the left a door communicating with the outer halls.

[XENOPHON is standing by the couch of CLAUDIUS. AGRIPPINA is sitting with face turned to an ASTROLOGER, who stands at the top of the steps watching the stars.

[LOCUSTA is crouching beside a pillar, right. A meteor strikes across the sky. The ASTROLOGER, pointing upwards, comes down the steps slowly.

ASTROLOGER. These meteors flame the dazzling doom of kings.

[AGRIPPINA *rises apprehensively.*

XENOPHON. Caesar is dead!

AGRIPPINA. The drug hath found his heart.

[*To LOCUSTA, who steals forward.*

Locusta, take your price and steal away!

Sound on the trumpet. Go! your part is done.

[*Exit LOCUSTA.*

[*Trumpet is sounded.*

That gives the sign to the Praetorians
Upon the instant of the Emperor's death.

[*Answering trumpets are heard.*

Hark! trumpets answering through all the city.
Xenophon, you and I are in this death
Eternally bound. This husband have I slain
To lift unto the windy chair of the world
Nero, my son. Your silence I will buy
With endless riches; but a hint divulged——

XENOPHON. O Agrippina, Empress, fear not me!

AGRIPPINA. Meantime his child, his heir, Britannicus,
Must not be seen lest he be clamoured for.
So till the sad Chaldean give the sign
Of that so yearned for, favourable hour,
When with good omens may my son succeed,
The sudden death of Claudius must be hid!
Then on the instant Nero be proclaimed
And Rome awake on an accomplished deed.

XENOPHON. Then summon Claudius' musicians in
To play unto the dead as though he breathed.

AGRIPPINA. Call them! A lulling music let them bring.
[*Exit* XENOPHON.]

[*She turns to* ASTROLOGER.]

O thou who readest all the scroll of the sky,
Stands it so sure Nero my son shall reign?

ASTROLOGER. Nero shall reign.

AGRIPPINA. What lurks behind these words?
There is a 'but' still hovering in the stars.

ASTROLOGER. Nero shall reign.

AGRIPPINA. The half! I'll know the rest.

ASTROLOGER. Peer not for peril!

AGRIPPINA. Peril! His or mine?

ASTROLOGER. Thine then.

AGRIPPINA. I will know all, however dark.
Finish what did so splendidly begin.

ASTROLOGER. Nero shall reign, but he shall kill his
mother.

AGRIPPINA. Kill me, but reign!

Enter SENECA

SENECA. The trumpet summoned me,
And I am here.

AGRIPPINA. Seneca! Speak it low!
Caesar is dead! Nero shall climb the throne.

SENECA. I will not ask the manner of his death.
In studious ease I have protested much
Against the violent taking of a life.
But lost in action I perceive at last
That they who stand so high can falter not,
But live beyond the reaches of our blame;
That public good excuses private guile.

AGRIPPINA. You, Xenophon and Burrus, stand with me.
Enter BURRUS, right. He salutes the corse of CLAUDIUS

BURRUS. Obedient to the trumpet-call I come.

AGRIPPINA. Say, Burrus, quickly say, how stands our
cause

With the Praetorians who unmake and make Emperors?

BURRUS. The Praetorians are staunch,
And they are marching now upon the Palace.

AGRIPPINA. Will they have Nero?

BURRUS. Yes, and double pay.
There is a murmuring minority
Who toss about the name Britannicus.
These may be feared; let Nero scatter gold
There where dissension rises—it will cease.
Their signal when they shall surround the Palace,
The gleam of my unsheathed sword to the dawn.

AGRIPPINA. Stand there until I have from him the sign,
Then let thy sword gleam upward to the dawn.

[*Turning and pointing to body of CLAUDIUS.*

That is my work! Also, I must betroth
Nero unto the young Octavia,
And with the dead man's daughter mate my son.
This marriage sets him firmer on the throne,
And foils the party of Britannicus.

[*To BURRUS.*] You for the army answerable stand.

[*To SENECA.*] And, Seneca, I have entrusted Nero's mind
To you, to point an eaglet to the sun.

Nero? What does he?

SENECA. Nero knows not yet
That Claudius is dead. Rome hath not slept,

But to the torch-lit circus all have run
To see him victor in a chariot race,
Whence he is now returning. A night race
By burning torches is his newest whim.

AGRIPPINA. A torch-lit race! And yet why not? My child
Should climb all virgin to the throne of the earth,
Not conscious of spilt blood: and I meantime
Will sway the deep heart of the mighty world.
The peril is Britannicus: for Nero,
Careless of empire, strings but verse to verse.
How shall this dove attain the eagle cry?

SENECA. Be not so sure of Nero's harmlessness.

AGRIPPINA. What do you mean?

SENECA. By me he has been taught,
And I have watched him. True, the harp, the song,
The theatre, delight this dreamer: true,
He lives but in imaginations: yet
Suppose this aesthete made omnipotent,
Feeling there is no bar he cannot break,
Knowing there is no bound he cannot pass;
Might he not then despise the written page,
A petty music, and a puny scene?
Conceive a spectacle not witnessed yet,
When he, an artist in omnipotence,
Uses for colour this red blood of ours,
Composes music out of dreadful cries,
His orchestra our human agonies,
His rhythms lamentations of the ruined,
His poet's fire not circumscribed by words,
But now translated into burning cities,